

Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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Saturday, April 29, 2006

Protest

Left-wing activists filed complaints accusing Philippine police of arbitrary detention and other offenses following the violent dispersal of anti-government rallies.

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Pinoy Idol

Apart from judge Ryan Cayabyab, there's another Ryan on "Philippine Idol." "Call me Ryan Seacreature," joked Ryan Agoncillo, alluding to "American Idol" host and namesake Ryan Seacrest.

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The Overseas Class

It's a life of lonely, risky sacrifice

By RICHARD C. PADDOCK
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Editor's Note: This article was first published in the Los Angeles Times on April 20, 2006.

They nurse the sick in California, drive fuel trucks in Iraq, sail cargo ships through the Panama Canal and cruise ships through the Gulf of Alaska. They pour sake for Japanese salarymen and raise the children of Saudi businessmen.

They are the Philippines' most successful export: its workers.

Three decades ago, seeking sources of hard currency and an outlet for a fast-growing population, then-President Ferdinand Marcos encouraged Filipinos to find jobs in other countries. Over time, the overseas worker has become a pillar of the economy. Nine million Filipinos, more than one out of every 10, are working abroad. Every day, more than 3,100 leave the country.

Philippine workers sent home more than \$10.7 billion last year, equal to about 12 percent of the gross domestic product.

The current president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, calls them "the backbone of the new global workforce" and "our greatest export."

Worldwide, these workers have earned a reputation for enterprise and hard work. They include some of the Philippines' most talented people, well educated and multilingual.

But as a third generation leaves to work abroad, it is clear the system has not led to prosperity. Policymakers have focused on easing the flow of workers rather than harnessing their earnings for economic development.

Dependence on the export of people has become a formula for stagnation. Once one of the strongest in Asia, the Philippine economy now ranks near the bottom. The government invests little money in manufacturing, education or healthcare. The economy can't

create even the 1.5 million jobs a year needed to keep up with population growth.

"We have a middle class, but they don't live in the

Philippines," said Doris Magsaysay Ho, head of a company that dispatches 18,000 workers a year to serve on ships around the world.

Filipinos work in every country except North Korea, said Labor Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas, whose brother is a doctor in Orange County. More than 2.5 million work in the United States and nearly a million in Saudi Arabia.

The money they earn trickles into towns and villages, helping build

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RP STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT

Population estimate: **88 million**
GDP, per person: **\$5,100**
Percent living in poverty: **30 percent**
Remittance income annually: **\$10.7 billion**

Sources: CIA World Factbook, World Bank, Philippine Department of Labor, Times reporting.
Compiled by John L. Jackson



Generosa Palaruan, a Filipino maintenance worker, has been regularly cleaning the facilities at Guma Hustisia in Susupe in the past few years.

Accident victim loses out on \$4K insurance benefit—Dait

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The Filipino man who was killed at a drainage construction site Tuesday after being pinned by a car on Beach Road in Chalan Kanoa was not a member of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, which means that his family would not be able to avail of at least \$4,000 in insurance benefit.

According to OWWA welfare officer Mary D. Dait, the victim, identified as Marcillano Garcia, had not renewed his OWWA membership, which could have provided his family the insurance benefit of at least Php 220,000.

Dait said that, had Garcia been an OWWA member, the money from the insurance could have helped his family. The money is apart from the amount the victim's company would provide his family.

Reports said the victim had been in and out of the CNMI since 1987.

Witnesses told Saipan Tribune that Garcia, a Filipino mason at Vargas Corp., was working in the drainage when he was pinned to death by the white Toyota Camry.

Another worker, Bonifacio Dimaunahan, was injured in the leg after he managed to jump out from the drainage area.

An OWWA employee said that, as soon as he read about the accident, he immediately searched the OWWA database to determine the eligibility of

ACCIDENT Page 3



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PINOYNEWS

THE OVERSEAS

FROM PAGE 1

houses, open restaurants and send children to school. But the absence of so many industrious and skilled people—mothers and fathers, engineers and entrepreneurs—exact a heavy toll.

Across the Philippines, children are being raised by their grandparents. “Now children can buy a lot of computer games, but they don’t have a mother or father, or both,” Santo Tomas said.

For the sake of supporting their families, the overseas workers endure years of loneliness. Some, especially maids in the Middle East, suffer beatings and sexual abuse. In countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, they are jailed for running away. Yet the Philippines has grown so dependent on remittances that the thought of doing without them is frightening.

“Money from abroad is the only thing that keeps the economy in motion,” said Ding Lichauco, former head of the country’s economic planning office. “If you don’t encourage the employees to go overseas, you will have revolution.”

■■■
Providing sailors, maids, entertainers and other workers for a growing world market is a big business.

In this competitive arena, the Philippines has an advantage. Many Filipinos speak English. They are generally better educated than workers from countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or Indonesia. And they have a reputation for being good-natured.

An entire bureaucracy has been created around them. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration helps find jobs in other countries, encourages workers to go abroad and processes some job applications.

The Technical Education and Skills Development Agency offers free training in welding, driving heavy trucks and other skills. The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration stations diplomats around the world to look after the Philippines’ foreign workers.

Those who bring or send their earnings home pay no income taxes. And the government offers returning workers low-cost equipment and tools to help them start small businesses.

With that level of encouragement, an industry has developed to match workers and jobs.

There are more than 1,500 licensed recruiting agencies. Some provide training—six months for dancers, four months for seafarers, two weeks for housekeepers—in return for a cut of the worker’s earnings.

A cook on a cargo ship can make more than Arroyo’s official salary of \$1,000 a month. A bar singer in Japan can earn more than a Philippine senator. But the fees can run into the thousands of dollars; the better the job, the greater the cost.

Dozens of agencies in Manila’s Ermita district attract job seekers from all over the country. Applicants line up on the streets, luggage in hand, ready to go anywhere.

Notaries sit at small wooden desks on the sidewalk. Using manual typewriters, they help workers fill out the 14 documents they are required to submit. Large copy machines on the sidewalk crank out duplicates.

Laboratories conduct blood, tuberculosis and drug tests to certify the workers’ health. Nearby are cellphone shops, money changers, cheap hotels

and restaurants.

Many Arab countries, with their vast oil wealth and relatively small populations, are hungry for workers.

The CDK International Manpower Services posted notices in its window seeking domestic workers and midwives in the Middle East, a gift wrapper in Dubai and a “magician balloon decorator” elsewhere in the United Arab Emirates. The agency was also recruiting workers for Burger King and Starbucks outlets in the Middle East. (“Must have fashion for coffee,” the ad for Starbucks said.)

Another company operating in the Middle East wanted diesel mechanics, flower arrangers, structural engineers, wedding card designers, massage therapists, website designers, accountants and nannies.

In another neighborhood, three blocks from the U.S. Embassy, a crowded sidewalk serves as an informal hiring hall for sailors. The Philippines produces nearly 25 percent of the world’s seafaring workers, more than any other nation.

Hundreds of would-be sailors were hanging around in the shade of the leafy narra trees as

agents wandered by, holding up signs offering jobs on ships sailing from Germany, Argentina, Los Angeles or Greece. Some sought engineers and first mates for cargo ships. Others needed chefs and waiters for cruises.

A salesman offered small vials of python oil, guaranteed to cure back pain, heart disease, joint dislocation, rheumatism, cough, arthritis and skin disease.

Merchants offered CDs providing instruction on how to moor a ship, plan a voyage, speak “maritime English” and handle hazardous materials.

Freddie Vicedo spent three decades at sea, earning enough to build a house 20 miles south of Manila and send his children to school. Now past the mandatory retirement age of 50, he was seeking one last job.

“It’s OK to be away if it provides you with a home and a future,” he said. “It’s better than living all together in poverty.”

■■■
The teeming neighborhood of Antipolo in central Manila is one of the city’s poorest. Thousands of families live along the railroad tracks in shanties of scrap wood and metal built one on top of the other, three stories high. Families sleep seven or eight to a room and cook over open fires between the tracks. Every month or so, someone is hit by a train.

Children play in garbage. Old women play mah-jongg on a rickety table. A woman patiently picks lice from a girl’s hair.

It is not uncommon for families to hold a wake in the middle of the sweltering streets, as Danilo Paredes did for his 18-year-old daughter, Raquel. Lying in an open coffin placed on a table, she looked small for her age, but at peace amid the chaos. Paredes said he didn’t know what killed her, only that he didn’t have the \$25 for the medicine the doctor prescribed.

Residents look for any way out.

“I hate this place,” said Mary Grace Libao, 13. She and her friend, Clarivel de los Santos, also 13, said they wanted to be singers in Japan.

“In Japan I will make enough money to buy a house for my family,” Clarivel said.

Thousands of Philippine musicians and singers perform at resorts and hotels from Bali, Indonesia; to Phuket, Thailand; to Tokyo. Many young women who go abroad as entertainers end up working in the sex trade.

All over Japan, salarymen come to Philippine pubs to escape the tedium and stress of their jobs. They drink sake and sing karaoke with “japayuki,” beautiful, scantily clad young women.

In Osaka, the Philippine clubs are concentrated in the crowded Dotonburi district. Many are

controlled by Japanese organized crime. Customers spend as much as \$500 an evening in one of the better establishments.

Large clubs typically stage a brief show in which the women sing a few songs and dance. The rest of the time, they flirt with the customers, pouring sake, feeding them and lighting their cigarettes. They can make more in tips in an evening than they could working for a month as a salesclerk back home. They can make even more if they agree to have sex.

“The customers make offers,” said Estrella Pumar, 31, who was heading from Manila to Osaka for her second tour. “It’s up to the girls to decide what kind of life to live.”

The women live six or seven to a room provided by their employers. If they are lucky, they get a day off every two weeks. Many aspire to marry a Japanese man and secure a residency permit. Having a child in Japan ensures residency status after a divorce, which is how 80 percent of these marriages end.

Wendy, 37, followed her mother to Japan in the 1990s. A brother and sister moved to Los Angeles. She spent 10 years working in pubs before marrying a Japanese man, having a son and opening her own club in Osaka, the Twin Angels.

“It’s better to be here than in the Philippines,” said Wendy, who declined to give her full name. But someday she’d like to return home and perhaps open a McDonald’s. In the meantime, she said, “we have to survive.”

■■■
The wards are overflowing at Negros Oriental Provincial Hospital, and dozens of patients lie on cots in the corridors. Some have just given birth. Others have just had surgery. Some will die in the hallway.

The hospital in Dumaguete, about 400 miles south of Manila, was built for 250 patients but usually has more than 350. Newborns stay in the same bed as their mothers; some have suffocated when their mothers rolled over in their sleep.

Patients who come here have no choice. It’s the only hospital in the region they can afford. But for the doctors there is a way out: Study nursing and leave for the United States or Europe, where qualified nurses are in short supply.

Medical regulations in the U.S. and European countries typically make it very difficult for foreign doctors to work there as physicians. But nurses are in such demand that some recruiters offer bonuses of \$15,000, the equivalent of three years’ pay for a doctor in Dumaguete.

Of 207 doctors in Negros Oriental province, 79 have become nurses and more than 30 are in

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LABOR FRONT

Terminating an alien worker

BY FERDIE DE LA TORRE
REPORTER

Q: What are the proper steps in terminating an alien worker for cause?

A: If an alien worker is terminated by an employer for cause before the end of the worker's contract, the employer shall give written notice to the worker and to the Division at least 10 days prior to the worker's expected termination date.

According to the Alien Labor Rules and Regulations, the notice shall state the name and Labor and Immigration Identification Documentation System card number of the worker, the reasons for termination, and the expected date of departure from the Commonwealth. A copy of the termination letter and proof of service on the employee of the same must be attached to the notice.

Upon receipt of a written termination notice, the Labor director or his designee shall immediately review the reasons for termination. If the Labor director finds that there is a question as to whether the employer has complied with relevant contractual provisions in terminating the worker or if the terminated worker files a grievance with the Division regarding the termination, the director shall immediately initiate an investigation.

■ ■ ■

Q: Does an alien worker need to buy drinking water at the worksite?

A: The employer shall provide an adequate supply of drinking water along with sufficient and sanitary toilet facilities at the worksite.

Every employer shall furnish and ensure the use of such safety devices and safeguards and shall adopt and use such means and practices as are reasonably adequate to render safe the employment and place of employment of all employees.

The employer shall not require the worker to work hours that are excessive so as to be damaging to the worker's mental and physical health.

■ ■ ■

Q: Do nonresident workers have the responsibility to maintain sanitary condition of the outside surrounding of their housing?

A: Yes. Grounds around the housing shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition, free of rubbish, debris, waste paper, garbage, and other refuse. Occupants of the housing are responsible for assisting in this maintenance responsibility to the degree that they generate such refuse.

Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune's* office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.

The United Filipino Organization has completed the construction of four concrete bleachers at the Civic Center in Susupe as part of the group's rehabilitation of the facility.

"We've adopted this as our project. It's a yearlong rehabilitation work at no cost to the local government," said UFO president Ronald Pamintuan yesterday.

He said the organization chose the center since it usually

used as a venue for several community events.

For one, he said that the UFO used to hold its annual basketball tournaments there.

Likewise, the Philippine Consulate General usually uses the venue to celebrate Pistang Pinoy during the Philippines' Independence Day.

The facility is also a favorite site for several other local activities: Sabalu market, Agricultural Fair, political cam-

paigns, walkathon assemblies, among others.

Years back, the UFO had built wooden benches around the civic center basketball court, but these are damaged now.

"We now want to put up concrete bleachers," he said.

Pamintuan said the court would need a total of six bleachers.

"We have to make two more," he said.

He said UFO volunteers dedi-

cated their weekend time to do the project.

"We are doing it with the help of our volunteers and sponsors," he said.

He said UFO gets donations from certain companies. Among them are RVE Construction and RP Construction, which give ready-mix concrete mix.

"We are grateful to our sponsors and volunteers," Pamintuan said.

98 OFWs finish POLO skills training

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

Another batch of overseas Filipino workers finished the first quarter batch of Philippine Overseas Labor Office Skills Upgrading Training Courses.

The 98 OFWs that underwent eight consecutive Sundays of comprehensive training in four courses—Basic Sewing, Nihonggo Class, Building and Fixing Computers, and English Develop-

mental Class—received their certificates of completion last Saturday at the Fiesta Hall, Hafa Adai Hotel in Garapan.

The trainees finished the courses that ran from Jan. 22 to March 12.

Ma. Teresa A. De Jesus, Leopoldo O. Rodriguez Jr., Marcelo V. Masilungan and Fe Y. Calixterio presented the graduates to distinguished guests, including Consul Belinda M. Ante, Labor Representative Joan Lourdes D. Lavilla and Overseas Workers

Welfare Administration welfare officer Mary D. Dait.

Class presidents Vicente C. Requiron Jr. and Onofre B. Macam led the response of graduates during the presentation ceremony.

Rev. Fr. Manny Corcuera led the invocation while Evans T. Contado sang the Philippine National Anthem. Teofilo L. Lumactod, one of the class presidents, opened the ceremony.

Ante was the keynote speaker during the com-

mencement exercises.

Following the dinner were a series of presentations performed by the graduates themselves. Each class rendered a song and dance number. Bayani Association showcased its group members' folk dancing skills during the event.

Ending the event was a speech from another class president David A. Damaso.

Lovely Lopez, Lailanie Dela Cruz, Randy Ramos and Phil Lumactod hosted the event.

Accountants Nite at Seaman's set on May 6

When summer assaults the senses with its searing heat, nothing can be more refreshing than a wacky evening by the sea.

Marianas Institute of Filipino CPAs and Accountants, or MIFICPA, will be organizing such an experience when it holds Accountants Nite on May 6, 5:30pm at the Seaman's Restaurant by the Port.

Those coming early will have a chance to witness the beautiful Saipan sunset and for dinner, MIFICPA and Seaman's Restaurant will be serving a sumptuous buffet, which consists of nothing less than fresh juicy fish, and other delights along with other special fare.

The evening is meant to welcome new members and help them get acquainted with current MIFICPA members and friends.

The plans and new programs of MIFICPA, like the U.S. CPA review and other new opportunities, will also be presented during the event.

Those planning to come are encouraged to bring along their own unique hat. A prize will be awarded to the one with the wackiest-looking hat.

Seaman's Restaurant is spa-

cious and allows a lot of room for fun-filled group activities. Accountants Nite will be a first-come, first-served event and MIFICPA will accept confirmation of attendance not later than

May 3. Admission is free.

For more information, check the MIFICPA website www.mificpa.org or contact Lemuel Arabelo at 433-2766 or Cris Lubi at 234-8300. (PR)

UP alumni to hold election, get-together

The University of the Philippines Alumni Association-CNMI Chapter (UPAA), will have a reunion/get together and election of officers on Saturday, May 6, 2006, starting at 5pm at the Filipino Workers Resource Center,

(POLO/OWWA area), first floor of the Nauru Building.

All graduates and former students of the University of the Philippines, including current UPAA members, are encouraged to attend the pot-

luck reunion.

For more information, call UPAA president Janet Villagomez at 288-3937 or send a text message to UPAA secretary Aura Lou Sabangan at 286-2547. (PR)

ACCIDENT

FROM PAGE 1

the victim and found out that the victim did not renew his membership this year.

The OWWA staff said the family he left behind could have received twice the benefits if he were an OWWA member since

the accident happened while he was at work.

Dait said, though, that even if Garcia was not an OWWA member, her office would still extend assistance to the family. She said her office would be raising funds for the victim's family.

Dait, who expressed sadness over this tragedy, is encouraging all Filipinos to renew their

membership with OWWA.

"It's for their families' protection," she said, adding that the membership does not only provide benefits when members die or meet accidents; members could also benefit from OWWA's education program for OFWs and their children, livelihood loans, and job onsite services, among many others.

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THE OVERSEAS

FROM PAGE 2

nursing school. This hospital is supposed to have 72 doctors, but only 43 remain. The Dumaguete district has closed two of its six rural hospitals and may soon have to close a third, said Dr. Ely Villapando, the province's chief health officer.

"We are worried sick about medical doctors taking up nursing and leaving," said Villapando, 63, who also runs the hospital. "We are losing the most skilled doctors. This is a crisis in healthcare."

An aid agency gave the hospital new cardiology equipment, but it sits unused. The hospital's only cardiologist left to become an emergency-room nurse in Chicago. What she earned in a month here, she can now make before lunch.

Here, patients are so poor that some pay in produce or livestock. X-rays cost a chicken. A bunch of bananas covers consultation. Delivering a baby costs one goat.

Villapando makes the equivalent of \$437 a month. Two of his children have become nurses in the United States, one in Bakersfield and one in Texas. They send him money.

"My son already has a house of his own," he said. "He has two cars. My daughter is building a house and has two cars. They could not hope to achieve that here."

To become nurses, the doctors attend classes on weekends for a year and spend 2,200 hours as volunteer nurses at the hospital. Sometimes they do both jobs the same day.

"Some of the patients get confused," said Dr. Joyce Maningo, an internist studying to be a nurse. "They say, 'Weren't you a doctor this morning?'"

An ophthalmologist with her own practice, Dr. Eileen Marie Macia is near the top of her profession. Her father was a surgeon and a congressman. He was instrumental in building a new wing of the Dumaguete hospital. But she, too, is giving up. She is in nursing school and weighing whether it would be better to live in Tennessee or Los Angeles.

"If I go to the States, I will have to forget I am a doctor," she said as she made her nursing rounds. "I love the Philippines, but it will always be a Third World country."

■■■

Runaway maids arrive at the Philippine Embassy in Kuwait desperate, bruised, hungry and penniless. They slip out of their employers' homes in the dead of night through a window, over a wall or by walking out a door accidentally left unlocked.

They break the law simply by leaving without permission.

Some spend more than a year in the embassy compound, waiting for their passports, back pay or the resolution of their legal cases. If they step outside, they can be arrested.

At times, more than 500

women live at the offices of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration next to the embassy. The building gets so crowded that the women cannot all lie down to sleep at the same time.

"It's like a prison," said Annabelle Abing, who lived there for three months.

More than 750,000 Philippine maids work in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries, where they often face legalized discrimination, beatings and sexual abuse.

The women frequently live in isolation, forbidden even to telephone their families. If they file a legal claim against their employer, they can be deported or imprisoned on

Fed up, she ran away to the employment agency's local office. But by the time she got there, her employers had already complained that she had stolen money and watches from their vault. Police came and arrested her.

Despite the absence of evidence or witnesses, she spent 13 months in jail, Macatiag said.

"They told me they were going to cut off my hand or I would be sentenced to 108 years or I would die in prison," she said. "Even during trial they told me my hand would be cut off unless I admitted to the allegations."

She maintained that she was innocent, but a Saudi court convicted her and she received five lashes on the hand with a

order to provide for parents and siblings. Most make the equivalent of \$420 a month and send more than half of it home.

Editha Ycon, 37, has worked 13 of the last 17 years in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan and now Hong Kong. She has a degree in computer programming but could not find work in the Philippines. She has left her son twice to go overseas, first when he was 6 months old and again when he was 4 years old. He is now 10.

"I want to stay with my son," she said. "I want to prepare his breakfast before he goes to school. I want to pack his things. I am a mother, but not really. I haven't been a mother yet."

the house to prove to the people they grew up with that they are a big success," he said.

But what Alvarez sees as evidence of waste and opulence gives another villager a deep sense of satisfaction.

Carlito Villanueva, 67, began sending his children to Spain and Italy in 1985. Now all nine of them live in Europe, along with their spouses and his 14 grandchildren.

"If they had not gone, I could only see hardship for them, because life here is very difficult," he said. "I'm not sad at all. I'm very happy. As a parent, my major goal is to secure a good life for them."

Each of the children is send-

methamphetamine.

"We grew up making our own decisions, and because of that we married young," she said. "Some children of overseas workers in this barrio fall into vice and lose direction in life."

When Escueta turned 22, she also went overseas, leaving her 1-year-old daughter, Yvonne, with a cousin.

Seeing her daughter for the first time in six years was not the reunion she was hoping for. Yvonne had become the terror of the neighborhood.

She slugged the boys when her mother's back was turned, making them cry. She killed kittens by hugging them to death, stepping on them or locking them in a closet, Escueta said. She killed a puppy by tying a string around its neck and letting it fall off a high bed.

"She loves them to death," her mother said.

Escueta acknowledged that the absence of so many parents meant troubles for the next generation of Filipinos.

"Going abroad has two sides," she said. "The bad side is the separation of the family. The children grow up without a mother's supervision. Sometimes they go astray. The good side is not just the income but the possibility the whole family could go overseas, which is my dream."

■■■

Angelo de la Cruz, a father of eight, was desperate. He needed to pay medical bills for a son who lost an eye in an accident and care for another who has Down syndrome.

He decided to leave his one-room bamboo hut two hours north of Manila and return to Saudi Arabia, where he'd worked three times. He left as a truck driver. He returned as a national symbol.

In July 2004, De la Cruz was ordered to deliver gasoline to U.S. troops in Iraq. He became separated from other trucks in the convoy and was abducted four hours after crossing the border.

His kidnappers demanded that the Philippines withdraw its contingent of 51 troops from the U.S.-led coalition. He expected to be beheaded. But with a narrow election victory behind her, President Arroyo could not risk offending the huge constituency of overseas workers and their families. She withdrew the Philippine troops a month ahead of schedule.

De la Cruz was freed after two weeks.

On his return home, he was showered with gifts: a new three-room house, a new motorcycle, a new job, a glass eye for his son and scholarships for his children.

"They kept saying I was a hero," he said. "I felt like I was just an ordinary person. Many say that I am a symbol of the Philippines. To this day, I keep wondering what it is I have become."

Paddock reported from the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Singapore and Thailand.



The nine employees of the Stardust and Starlite nightclubs talk to the media outside their employers' housing on Capitol Hill. Eight dancers and one bartender told the media Tuesday that their employers David Atalig and his wife Corazon Atalig are kind. They said the allegations made by some of their co-workers are false. Police arrested the couple for allegedly employing minor girls and forcing them to dance naked and do other lewd acts. The couple denied the charges.

trumped-up charges.

"They are treated like modern slaves," said Maita Santiago, secretary-general of Migrant International, a rights group for Philippine workers. "When workers are in distress, the government doesn't stand up for their rights for fear of the markets of foreign countries closing to Filipino workers."

Perhaps the toughest country for domestic workers is Saudi Arabia.

Sheila Marie Macatiag, 28, was earning \$12 a month at a car stereo factory in the Philippines when she decided to take a job in Saudi Arabia to support her parents and six younger siblings.

Macatiag said she was forced to work from 5 a.m. to midnight, verbally abused for the smallest mistake and never given enough to eat. During her first six months, her employers paid her a total of \$200; she had paid \$300 to an employment agency in the Philippines to get the job.

cane. She has returned to the Philippines but doesn't expect to find a job.

"There are so many people here and so few jobs," Macatiag said. She is hoping to leave the country again: "Anywhere but the Middle East," she said.

Even if there is no abuse, the emotional toll of being away from home can be heavy.

In Hong Kong, Philippine maids gather by the thousands in the city center every Sunday to spend their day off together. They fill the parks and sidewalks and overflow into the streets. Sitting on cardboard or sheets of plastic, they hold prayer meetings, play cards and have picnics.

Beneath the festivity is a sense of melancholy. These women spend the best years of their lives serving others.

Many leave their children behind so they can earn enough to pay for their schooling. Others forgo the chance to marry in

■■■

The people of Santa Rosa, a village two hours south of Manila, once made a living processing coconuts. But the men who worked in the drying sheds left the country long ago.

Now the village is known as Little Italy. It depends almost entirely on remittances from abroad. Of its 8,000 people, 3,000 work overseas, mainly in Italy and Spain. Left behind are children, the elderly and the disabled.

Overseas workers contributed money to build the two-story village office. A worker in Spain donated the village computer. Others helped buy an ambulance. But the village is distinguished by the more than 600 large Italian-style houses built with money sent home from overseas.

Village head Benito Alvarez, who wears a USA T-shirt given to him by cousins in America, said the owners were unlikely ever to live in them. "They build

ing money to build a house in the family compound. Four have been built, and a fifth is planned. All are unoccupied, except on the rare occasion when one of the children comes home for a visit.

"This is their home," he said. "Wherever they are in the world, even though they are scattered, they will come home to me."

Another neighbor, Digna Escueta, 28, hadn't been home since she left to work as a maid in Padua, Italy, six years earlier. She came back for two weeks to try to straighten out a domestic nightmare: Her husband was in prison for drug use, and her daughter was out of control.

Her parents worked overseas when she was growing up, starting with her mother when Escueta was 11. A brother and sister followed. Altogether, more than 50 relatives found work in Italy.

Escueta married as a teenager and soon had a baby. Her husband became addicted to

Former VP: Stop charter-change efforts

By **TERESA CEROJANO**
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Former Philippine Vice President Teofisto Guingona and opposition groups on Thursday asked a court to stop a nationwide signature campaign endorsed by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to change the Constitution, saying the move is illegal.

Guingona and representatives of anti-government groups asked the suburban Quezon City court to prohibit the Com-

mission on Elections from verifying signatures of Filipinos endorsing the move to change the Constitution, which would effectively halt the effort.

Under the Constitution, the signatures of 3 percent of total voters in each electoral district are needed for a “people’s initiative” to amend the basic law.

Guingona and the other petitioners said the signature campaign would allow constitutional changes that would empower Arroyo to dissolve Congress, create an unelected parliament, extend the terms of

public officials and sell private lands to foreigners.

They called the initiative “contrary to law, the Constitution and existing jurisprudence” and a “grave abuse of discretion.”

Guingona represents the opposition group “People’s March.” The other petitioners included officers of left-wing groups such as the umbrella organization Bayan, the Peasants’ Movement of the Philippines or KMP, the lawyers’ group Counsels for the Defense of Liberties, and several individuals.

They asked the court to issue a writ of prohibition to permanently stop election officials from verifying the signatures and to issue a temporary restraining order while their petition is being considered.

Church leaders, including the influential group of Roman Catholic bishops and a popular Christian lay leader, have expressed alarm over the petition campaign, saying people were being made to sign the petitions without adequate explanation, and the proposed changes were vague and open

to manipulation by groups with self-serving interests.

Opposition groups claim that Arroyo is proposing constitutional changes to ensure her grip on power and divert attention from a months-long political impasse over corruption and vote-rigging allegations against her.

The proposed changes include a shift from the current U.S.-style presidential system to a parliamentary form of government in which Arroyo could share power with a parliamentary leader but retain her post as

president, critics say.

Arroyo’s camp says her intention is to ensure the passage of laws needed to bring the country to economic prosperity.

“We shall continue to listen to all sensible and sincere views and take stock of these, but the die has been cast on the course we have to take for the national interest,” her spokesman, Ignacio Bunye, said Thursday. He said constitutional amendments were needed to overhaul a system degenerating because of excessive politicking.

Leftist activists file complaint vs police for violent dispersal

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Left-wing activists on Thursday filed complaints accusing Philippine police of arbitrary detention and other offenses following the violent dispersal of anti-government rallies, according to officials and documents.

The complaints, filed before the government’s ombudsman against several senior police officials including National Police chief Arturo Lomibao, comes two days after the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a government order to break up nonviolent opposition rallies.

Other complaints filed Thursday included unlawful arrest, maltreatment and arbitrary detention.

Activists including those from left-wing umbrella group Bayan and the Gabriela women’s organization cited the violent police dispersal of their rallies on October 4 and 6 last year and on April 6 this year.

In an apparent blow to President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s administration, Supreme Court justices on Tuesday voted 13-0 to declare the government’s “calibrated pre-emptive response” policy unconstitutional, saying it violates the freedom of assembly.

“Not only is the policy unconstitutional as declared by the Supreme Court, it is also a horrible assault to human dignity for which the Arroyo government must be held accountable,” another activist group, Akbayan, in a statement issued Thursday.

The order was imposed start-

ing in September, as Arroyo faced mounting opposition rallies after she escaped an impeachment bid on vote-rigging and corruption allegations.

The court upheld a 21-year-old public assembly law requiring organizers to get permits for rallies in public places. But it also gave local governments 30 days to designate “freedom parks,” where demonstrations can be held without a permit, under the same law.

“We won’t offer any apologies because all we have done were in accordance with the law,” national police spokesman Senior Superintendent Samuel Pagdilao said in reaction to the complaints.

He said that police actions have been in accordance with the public assembly law upheld by the court, and that all concerned officers were ready to defend themselves in court.

Lomibao said Wednesday the ruling will not affect the police force’s mandate to keep public assemblies peaceful and orderly.

Presidential Spokesman Ignacio Bunye warned also on Wednesday that police will not hesitate to use force to contain unrest, saying the court ruling was not a license to foment destabilization.

Manila Mayor Lito Osmena said protests will be allowed in designated freedom parks in the capital, Manila—but not near the presidential palace, because such gatherings may be exploited by “elements with an agenda.”



DEMOLITION

Demolition crew (in blue shirts) and squatters cross to the other side of the railroad track after a dilapidated train passed by in Manila on Thursday April 27, 2006. Demolition crew continue to tear down shanties along railroad tracks in Manila and the suburbs to pave the way for the rehabilitation of the railway system north and south of Manila mainly through the aid from China.

‘I’d rather have the money than slit Imelda’s throat’

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—An official from the Philippine government agency assigned to recover the alleged ill-gotten wealth of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his widow, Imelda, said Thursday he was more interested in their money than an apology.

Marcos was ousted in the first Philippine “people power” revolt in 1986, ending his 20-year rule. He died in exile in Hawaii three years later without admitting any wrongdoing. His widow and his three children have resisted calls to apologize for his strongman rule and corruption.

“I think the issue of apology is between Imelda Marcos and her God. That is a moral issue,” Ricardo Abcede said Thursday. “I would rather have Imelda Marcos’ millions than slit her throat.”

Abcede, one of five members of the Presidential Commission on Good Government, is pushing for a possible compromise agreement with Imelda Marcos in resolving over 500 criminal and civil cases involving alleged corruption of the Marcoses and their cronies that have been tied up in litigation for the past 20 years.

Abcede’s drive to reach the compromise—particularly in not seeking an apology—has been denounced by Karapatan, a human rights group, which said Abcede was “insensitive to the victims of Marcos rule.”

“This is a heinous crime, not petty theft,” said the group’s secretary general, Marie Enriquez. “This is a slap on the face of the victims of martial law and generations of Filipinos who lost the opportunity to live a decent life just because of personal greed and corruption.”

RP, Malaysia seek new strategies to aid Muslims

By **SEAN YOONG**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP)—Measures aimed at helping Muslims in the conflict-wracked southern Philippines to overcome poverty, extremism and violence topped the agenda Thursday in talks between Malaysian and Philip-

pine government officials.

The Malaysia-Philippines Joint Commission began its first meeting since July 2004 with delegates pondering a wide range of issues including a decades-long Muslim separatist insurgency in the southern Philippines, which borders Malaysia’s eastern territory on Borneo island.

“It is to our interest to see stability, prosperity and sustainable development in both the Philippines and Malaysia, as well as the region,” Malaysian Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Rastam Isa said in a speech to open the two-day

meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

The delegates are expected to present proposals to Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar and his Philippine counterpart, Alberto Romulo Friday on how the countries can cooperate in socio-economic projects and to improve Islamic schools in the Muslim-dominated southern Philippines.

Malaysia has played a key role in easing volatility in the Mindanao region of the Philippines, where a cease-fire is currently in place between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the

country’s largest Muslim separatist group.

Malaysia, one of Southeast Asia’s wealthiest, most stable countries, is hosting peace talks between both sides and has deployed troops to monitor the truce. Malaysia has a mostly Muslim population, while the Philippines is predominantly Roman Catholic.

Delegates at this week’s bilateral talks were also exploring Malaysia’s proposal for the Philippines to set up a consulate office in Sabah, Malaysia’s eastern state on Borneo island, to handle Filipino migrants working there.

PINOYSTYLE

Chat Silayan: Remembering a real pro

By **MARINEL R. CRUZ,**
SHEENA JADE BARRION
INQUIRER

I did everything I could for her, to the point of quarreling with her doctors. I kept thinking, 'I only had one shot at this; No take two.' I wanted to make sure that we were doing the right thing."

This was what Mike Bailon, husband of the late Ma. Rosario "Chat" Silayan, recounted to Inquirer Entertainment about the painful decisions the family had to make as they struggled with the disease that eventually lead to the death of the actress-beauty queen.

Ma. Rosario Silayan, 1980 Miss Universe third runner-up, passed away after a two-year bout with colon cancer on Sunday night at the St. Luke's Hospital in Quezon City. She was 46.

Chat's cancer was diagnosed in 2004. Mike said his wife had already been in pain—mostly in her lower back—for three weeks at the time of her death.

"She was so prepared for this. We were really hoping that God would grant us a miracle. But He had another agenda," Mike said on Tuesday at the actress' wake held at the Santuario de



Chat Silayan

San Antonio in Forbes Park, Makati City. "I'm sure His purpose is for the good of everyone. We don't see it clearly now, but one day I know we'll understand."

Chat's friend, scriptwriter-actress Raquel Villavicencio, said only a few friends knew about her condition. "She didn't want other people to know," said Raquel.

But Mike said his wife had planned to "come out" with her illness this month on her weekly show "700 Club." "She had wanted to share her

experience with others. But we first had to prepare her emotionally," said Mike.

Eddie Ilarde, Chat's co-host in the '80s top-rating noon-time show "Student Canteen," remembers her as a smart, hardworking and dedicated professional.

"I'd like to think that Chat was our discovery—(cohost) Bobby Ledesma and I," he said. "Chat came in fresh from her stint in the Miss Universe contest. She was always willing to learn."

National Artist for Film Eddie Romero described Chat as a "good and disciplined" actress. The director had worked with Chat in the movie "Sumakalawa." "I even got to work with her late father Vic," Romero added. "She learned a lot step by step and she became very good."

Director Rory Quintos had worked with Chat in the ABS-CBN soap series "Esperanza" in 1997 and "Ipaglaban Mo: The Movie (Part 2)" in 1999. She said she found Chat, who is also a registered nutritionist-dietician, to be very professional.

"She was friends with everybody. She went out of her way to reach out to everyone

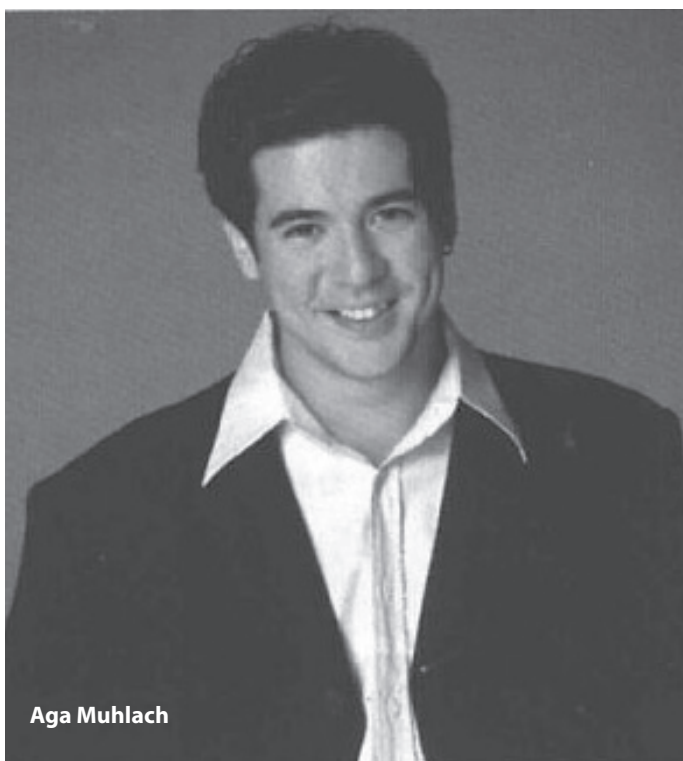
on the set," the director said. "The news that she had cancer came as a shock. She lead a very healthy lifestyle."

"You will never be ready for this kind of experience," said choreographer Maribeth Bichara. "You don't know what to eat or what to do anymore. Kaya ako, I just enjoy life and continue loving the people I know."

According to former video jock Donita Rose, Chat passed away two hours after she visited the actress at St. Luke's intensive care unit. "I was there at around 5 p.m. She was asleep so I just prayed for her," Donita shared. "I told God, 'I know that if You want her healed, You can make it happen. But if it's Your will for her to go, just please take away the pain and let her go in peace.'"

Chat's long-time friend Connie Reyes said she was supposed to have a date with the actress last week, but ended up visiting her. "When I saw her in the hospital, I told her: 'You're thin, but still beautiful.' Her hair was still thick, long and shiny. Pang-Miss Universe pa rin."

Chat will be laid to rest on April 29 at the Manila Memorial Park in Parañaque City.



Aga Muhlach

started to ache because of all the weight they're carrying."

Aga and Sharon are about to do a movie for Star Cinema, to be directed by Lauren Dyogi. "It will be an adult romance film, and will be shot abroad," Aga said of the upcoming project, "In order for our team-up to work, Sharon and I should look good together. When we look at each other, she should fall in love with me, and I with her."

Which, he implied, might not be plausible between two overweight lead stars.

Aga discovered he had hypercholesterolemia—very high level of cholesterol in his bloodstream—early last year.

"I also found out that being thin doesn't mean you're healthy. That's when I included oatmeal in my diet," said Aga, who is the newest endorser of Quaker Oats. "I'm starting to lose weight, I think because I'm eating right. Also, I go to the gym twice a day—for weights, then for boxing. I have made this my lifestyle. No short cuts. No pills. No surgery."

On the other hand, he said, his wife Charlene, a sweet tooth, is cutting her intake of sugar. "Fortunately, she has no weight problem. Since she grew up in the States, she's used to not eating rice and pork. She loves salads and fish. The twins

Aga tells good friend Sharon to lose weight

By **MARINEL R. CRUZ**
INQUIRER

Aga Muhlach is determined to lose weight.

He's so into it, in fact, that he's been encouraging close friends to do the same if they need to.

Among these friends is singer-actress Sharon Cuneta.

"I told her it's wrong to think that people should accept you just the way you are. I said we owed it to the public to look good," the award-winning actor told Inquirer Entertainment in an exclusive interview on Thursday. "I said to her, 'if you want to go on making movies, it's your responsibility to your fans to stay fit.'"

In a previous interview with Inquirer, Sharon admitted that she was unable to shed weight as fast as she'd like to. She gained the most weight, she said, after giving birth to her third child, Miel. She said she was currently on the South Beach diet.

Aga pointed out: "It's not easy, especially for those of us who have been heavy for quite a while. Losing weight definitely takes time after many years of not working out, of just eating and doing nothing. I played basketball recently and I couldn't move freely. My knees have

(Atasha and Andres) are taking oatmeal, too."

How do you pick the products you will endorse?

You say yes to endorsing products that you really believe in. You don't want to endorse, for example, a plant fertilizer that you know would harm people and the environment. I choose to promote products that I actually use at home.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) filed a tax evasion case against Regine Velasquez when she failed to declare her earnings from endorsing Nestlé, in 2003. Are you diligent in this department?

They will never have a case

against me. I pay my taxes, kahit masama ang loob ko (even with a heavy heart). And why shouldn't I feel bad? It's an open secret that a lot of Filipinos are not truthful when it comes to paying their taxes. This is because they don't trust government officials with their money. They know that the money they give is not put to good use.

These officials can't even provide decent schools for children in the provinces. You don't have to go far. Just look around. People are disappointed with the lack of support from the government. Billions and billions of money are being pocketed by corrupt officials.

RP 'Idol' finds 1st host in Ryan Agoncillo

By **BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.**
INQUIRER

Apart from judge Ryan Cayabyab, there's another Ryan on "Philippine Idol."

"Call me Ryan Seacreature," joked Ryan Agoncillo, alluding to "American Idol" host and namesake Ryan Seacrest.

Evidently, humor clinched the deal for the TV star who won the first of two slots as hosts of "Philippine Idol," which premieres on ABC 5 in July.

"Or Ryan Secret," jested Agoncillo, referring to the shroud of secrecy that enveloped his latest career triumph. After all, it was no mean feat, besting dozens of hopefuls who auditioned for the coveted spots.

Agoncillo was the first name to be confirmed; the identities of the remaining two judges and the other host are still being kept under wraps by ABC 5 producers.

In fact, Agoncillo wasn't allowed to divulge the good news to anyone. Not even to his girlfriend, actress Judy Ann Santos?

"I haven't told her yet," he quipped.

He said she'd surely be pleased with it because, "it's a job... and an exciting one at that."

Inquirer Entertainment knew about it; Agoncillo even gamely recounted the audition process.

"I was very nervous," he recalled. "I haven't auditioned for anything in a long time. I went on a dinner break (from the taping of the ABS-CBN soap opera) 'Bituing Walang Ningning' and I rushed to the ABC 5 studio in Novaliches. I had to learn my lines as I walked to the studio."

Fortunately, the audition went smoothly... and swiftly. "It was over in three minutes," Ryan recalled. He was asked to introduce the show and "console a female contestant that had just been bashed by a Simon Cowell-type judge because of her lousy fashion sense."

Agoncillo surmised that his "experience as TV host" gave him the edge over the other wannabes.

Spontaneity

"I've been doing this for a living for seven years now," he explained.

"Spontaneity," he believed, was also a factor.

"I'm comfortable with ad-libbing," he pointed out. "It's easier for me because I get to dictate the tempo. I'm not constrained by a TelePrompter, idiot board or script. I've reached a point in my hosting where I now know when and when not to bend and break rules and put them together in one breath."

According to Agoncillo, producers encourage hosts and judges to speak Filipino, English or Taglish. "Whatever we're comfortable with."

Agoncillo, who won a KBP Golden Dove Award for Best Talk and Magazine Show host in 2005 for "Y Speak," isn't aiming to be a Seacrest clone.

"The producers were not looking for another Ryan Seacrest," he said. "For the most part, they want his vibe, but they don't want a carbon copy."

If there's one Seacrest trait he would like to emulate, it's the American host's ability to elicit candid remarks from the contestants.

"Seacrest can really make the contestants open up," Agoncillo opined. "I also want to have a say in my spiels, in defending contestants when judges get too rough or reining in the contestants when they get too abrasive."

That, in a nutshell, is his job as host.

"More than the jacket, I am just the thread that holds the show together," he affirmed. The jacket or the real stars of the show are the contestants.

"My responsibility as host is to let the contestants shine. I should know when to leave them alone and when to pump them up."

Agoncillo, who follows "AI" (he's rooting for rocker Chris Daughtry), said that "the local auditions in Manila, Cebu and Davao would definitely be fun."



Ryan Agoncillo

A tendency to make enemies

A small political tempest is blowing over the heckling President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo got on April 21 from a graduating student at the Cavite State University. The incident should have been dismissed as one of the occupational risks of the presidency, but it is being blown up to significance by firstly, the overreaction of the administration, and secondly, by the attempts of some of the President's enemies to score political points.

It was most probably farthest from the mind of Maria Theresa Pangilinan that

she would walk into a controversy with her audacious act. But now she has become a political football. The administration added fuel to the fire when the Indang town police filed a complaint of alarm and scandal against Pangilinan and another graduate as well as members of the Solidarity of Cavite Workers who used the graduation

ceremony as an occasion to stage a protest against the President. An overzealous justice secretary made things worse by directing the National Bureau of Investigation to investigate Pangilinan.

The controversy started when Pangilinan, who was to receive her diploma from the President, stood up as the President was making a speech, unfurled a banner saying "No to Cha-cha" ["No to Charter change"] and shouted, "Patalsikin si Gloria!" ["Eject Gloria!"]. At the same time, a group of protesters from the left-leaning Bagong Alyansang Makabayan and the Solidarity of Cavite Workers raised red streamers calling on the President to step down. The President's security men confiscated the banner from Pangilinan, and hustled out the group of other protesters. But Pangilinan was not prevented from marching up the stage to receive her diploma.

While it seems clear that Pangilinan's

outburst was not a spontaneous act, the worst offense that can be laid against her is disrespect and rudeness to the President. The latter could have just ignored it and kept her dignity, but her minions took offense at her embarrassment and magnified the incident as something meriting state concern.

The threats of prosecution made by the justice secretary were sufficient to provoke the President's critics to turn the case into a political issue. Senate Minority Floor Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said embarrassing the President was not a crime. Senate President Franklin Drilon made "freedom of expression" an issue, saying Pangilinan was merely expressing a grievance against the President and voicing the truth when she called her a "fake president." Drilon said Pangilinan was "just a student and every Filipino has a right to expressed his or her sentiment." Sen. Panfilo Lacson joined the two senators in rebuking the justice secretary for

"unleashing" the NBI on Pangilinan. Pangilinan said she did not regret her act. However, she had her own political spin. "What I did was a political exercise guaranteed by the Constitution," she said. "What I did was to stand for what many Filipinos believe is the truth: that [Ms Arroyo] cheated to win the presidency."

Pangilinan further said that she was not afraid to face any investigation." And ringing with self-righteousness, she added, "I am not like Ms Arroyo who needed to use her allies in Congress to block her impeachment and hide the truth."

From her statements, Pangilinan has made political judgments on the impeachment case and the "truth" about the allegations that the President "cheated to win the presidency."

When Pangilinan heckled the President, what was at issue was not her right to express her views on important public

matters. No one can dispute her right to do so. It may however be asked whether the heckling had confirmed her perceived version of the "truth" and whether it brought us nearer to the "truth" about the cheating. If it did not, what purpose did the heckling serve, except to show some lapses in good manners and courtesy?

Nevertheless, such lapses do not justify the government's bearing down on a disrespectful person with the full force of its powers. The heavy-handed response of the administration highlights its propensity to create more enemies than it needs and to make martyrs out of citizens who happen to hold beliefs that contradict those of the administration.

This tendency started to crystallize during the declaration of a national emergency last March, when the President cracked down on the press with the raids on editorial offices of newspapers and radio-TV stations critical to the administration. The crackdown made out the media as the foremost enemy of the state rather than the military officers who actually tried to stage a coup d'état. In doing so, the administration fabricated and imagined enemies which were not really its enemies. The President's battle with the media has been unnecessary. It's a wasteful expenditure of national energy, since the media were not really the source of her political problems.

In the Indang fiasco, the administration is repeating the error of wrong identification of enemies in Proclamation No. 1017. It should reserve its heavy artillery for more life-threatening challenges rather than on protests staged by hecklers whose claim to being remembered as heroic figures standing up for good government is grounded on their landing on the front pages of yesterday's newspapers. The administration has more to worry about from the challenges arising from the implementation of two recent Supreme Court decisions on Executive Order 464 and on the Calibrated Preemptive Response policy.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The greatest sin is to be born poor

When I was a child, during the Lenten season, our poor neighborhood usually held "Pabasa" [public reading of the Passion] in front of a makeshift altar built at the end of our street. The elders collected money from every house for expenses during this event (my mother was always asked to keep the money; she was trusted for her honesty and integrity).

The bulk of the collection was spent on sumptuous dishes for the invited priest that held Mass on the makeshift altar after the "Pabasa," on Easter Sunday. The priest who came was always chubby and "mestizo" and reminded me of Padre Damaso when I read "Noli Me Tangere" in high school.

I could not understand why we had to give all we had to serve expensive food to a priest who represented Jesus. Wasn't he supposed to suffer with the poor? Wouldn't there be any Mass if the neighborhood could not offer good food?

I attended our family's and neighbors' baptism and wedding ceremonies that were held on any day except Sunday and were always at the side and never in front of the church's altar. A minimum of lights was turned on, which cast eerie shadows.

In contrast, while attending Sunday Mass, I witnessed weddings that had all of the church's chandeliers lighted, a red carpet laid from the main entrance all the way to the altar, and the organ playing at full volume.

Once, I was taken to an uncle's funeral. We passed by our church. The coffin was removed from the hearse, the priest came out, said a prayer and sprinkled holy water, and off we went. In contrast, I sometimes saw coffins inside the church. I wondered: Were the souls of those dead people worthier than my uncle or my neighbors who had died? Their coffins were allowed in, but the ones from our neighborhood just passed by without even entering the church doors.

The nuns who came to our neighborhood on Saturday afternoons (to teach catechism) told us that everybody was equal in the eyes of God. If that was so, why weren't we equal in the house of God?

The public schools were no better -- teachers hardly noticed bright, intelligent children dressed in faded old clothes. Test results hardly mattered. What mattered were children who were dressed better, children who gave money for fund drives, children with professional parents active in PTAs.

Listening, looking and observing, I realized that the greatest sin was to be born poor. The sins of lying, cheating, stealing, corruption, greed and gluttony, etc. can be forgiven but not the sin of being poor.

Aimee Gonzales
via e-mail

Instructions for commanders

One of my constant prayers is that young historians or Filipinos interested in history will take an interest in the boxes of primary source material sitting in the National Library that documents the First Philippine Republic. This huge cache of material used to be known as the "Philippine Insurgent Records" (PIR), but following the revisiting and rewriting of our history, they have since been renamed the "Philippine Revolutionary Records" (PRR). What looks like simple library classification can be very significant because the US Library of Congress, whose catalogue once belittled our struggle for independence as a mere "insurrection," now describes that bloody part of our history as the "Philippine-American War." Anyone who goes through the papers in the PRR will not only get the thrill of seeing the original handwriting of Emilio Aguinaldo, Apolinario Mabini, Antonio Luna, or Pio and Gregorio del Pilar but also read eyewitness or first-hand accounts of the events that are now history to us.

Those who cannot make the trip to the National Library or those who have difficulty reading handwriting

or Spanish can have recourse to the five-volume compilation of documents by J.R.M. Taylor, "The Philippine Insurrection against the United States." Not only is it easy to consult, but everything has been translated (not always accurately) from the original Spanish or other Philippine languages into English.

What I find most fascinating after the lists and accounts are the orders, instructions and proclamations that emanated from Aguinaldo's office. These give us an idea of the conditions during the war, what the enemy was like, what our army was like. One draft document that I found engaging was a short list of instructions for the commanders. For example, Aguinaldo or his command headquarters told commanders that:

"2. It is advisable that beaches, river banks, and landing places be carefully examined, and the best manner of resistance thought out, awaiting the landing of the enemy so that each Filipino soldier can fight against three, and our troops shall be placed in concealed places in such manner that they can freely move about and place the enemy between two or three fires and make it impossible for him to see our men, not

even those armed with bolos, with the exception of a few who open conversation with the enemy, whenever it can be easily done according to the circumstances of the time. But if the enemy should insist on landing, then the above orders shall be carried out without loss of time."

Obviously, the instructions are stale today, but they can still be mined for historical reasons. The situation at the time can be deduced from the instructions like:

"All commanders shall carefully look after the soldiers of their commands at meals and shall always enjoy them not to fire without first calculating the distance of the enemy (that is they will fire sure shots). The first shots are sufficient to ascertain the range [remainder of sentence illegible]. I know that there is still some ordering or following the Spanish system—that is, firing without causing damage to the enemy—and others who throw down ammunition

to finish it soon and lead one to believe that they have done much firing, or to withdraw soon so that his comrades shall not consider him a coward. These acts are a dishonor to the true defenders of our Mother Philippines. While those men who act thus are very brave in

times of peace with their Filipino brothers and the people of the town, the real revolutionaries or defenders of the fatherland are those who see themselves humiliated and cast down because they now have their eyes opened and know what is true."

This is reiterated a second time later in the same document:

"Every commander should take care that his troops do not open fire until the enemy find themselves within 300 yards of them; but the whole combat must be arranged so that finally an attack with the bolo can be carried out."

Our army was firing without hitting anyone? They were just making noise? This definitely doesn't jibe with our



Looking Back
By **AMBETH OCAMPO**
INQUIRER

images of the revolution.

He also tells the men to pray. "Let them have faith in our Maker, for if they put their trust in Him, the balls [bullets] will fly from them."

Spies are to be assassinated. "The commanders must have it thoroughly understood by the troops under their command that every member of their command is authorized to seize anyone who shows by his actions that he is a spy of the enemy, as by interfering with the effect of the attacks of his column by acts which cause fear or sudden death to his companions. In case the circumstances do not permit his arrest, anyone has the right to kill him by shooting him."

Finally, the victorious must be generous: "It must not be forgotten that when an enemy surrenders and submits that he has been vanquished, he must be pardoned and well-treated, thus showing that the past has been forgotten; and in case during an action the white flag is hoisted by one of the enemy, our soldiers must cease firing."

Old instructions can actually create new histories.

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu.

SAMU'T SARI

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



COMPUTER TECHIES

The Building And Fixing Computer Class is shown here in action. The Philippine Overseas Labor Office sponsors several continuing education classes at its office on the ground floor of the Nauru Building in Susupe.

JIMMY BLANCIA



FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

The Filipino organization MOVER recently celebrated its fifth anniversary with a get-together among its members at the Kilili Beach. Here, members pose for a souvenir photo.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



NIHONGO CLASS

The Basic Nihongo class at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office, Filipino Workers Resource Center. The POLO sponsors several continuing education classes every year for the benefit of overseas Filipino workers in the CNMI.

JIMMY BLANCIA



RUMMAGE SALE

The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration-OFW Support Group held a rummage sale on April 23 to benefit OWWA's Tuloy-Aral Project. The event was held from 9am to 6pm at the Minachom Atdao in Susupe in front of the Gilbert C. Ada Gym. OWWA's Tuloy-Aral Project sponsors the education of children of former OFWs. Here, members of the Support Group pose during the event.

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FUN IN THE SUN

Members of Filipino organization MOVER pose for a souvenir shot during the celebration of the group's fifth anniversary at the Kilili Beach.

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PENITENCE

A man carries a wooden cross toward the peak of Mt. Tapochau as part of the Good Friday tradition. Filipino devotees consider this act as a sort of penance for sins committed.

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OFW SUPPORT GROUP

OFW Support Group members clown around for the camera during the rummage sale it held n April 23 to benefit OWWA's Tuloy-Aral Project. The event was held at the Minachom Atdao in Susupe in front of the Gilbert C. Ada Gym.

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SEWING CLASS

The Basic Sewing class in action at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office, Filipino Workers Resource Center. The POLO sponsors several continuing education classes every year for the benefit of overseas Filipino workers in the CNMI.

Maharlika
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